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New Teachers Speak Out On:

- Teacher Preparation
- Career Choices
- Their Expectations of:
  - Students
  - Parents and the Community
  - Fellow Teachers
  - Administrators

The Metropolitan Life Survey of the American Teacher 1990

New Teachers: Expectations and Ideals

Part I: Entering the Classroom

Metropolitan Life
AND AFFILIATED COMPANIES

SURVEYS IN THIS SERIES

The present report is part of a series of surveys, representing a sustained program of research that brings teachers' opinions to the attention of the American public and policymakers.

First in the series is *The Metropolitan Life Survey of the American Teacher*, released in 1984. This first comprehensive report on the attitudes of elementary and secondary school teachers toward public education in the United States measures and analyzes teachers' attitudes about educational reform. It reveals just how much teachers themselves are open to change and are willing to be an integral part of the reform process itself.

The Metropolitan Life Survey of the American Teacher, 1985: Strengthening the Profession examines teachers' own agenda for educational reform, and reports what classroom teachers across the nation think is necessary to strengthen the teaching profession and attract and retain good teachers.

Next in the series is *The Metropolitan Life Survey of the American Teacher, 1986: Restructuring the Teaching Profession.* This survey explores the current structure of the teaching profession, as well as ways to restructure it. The project surveys virtually every level of educational leadership across the country. It reports the views of individual teachers, of school principals and district superintendents, of state legislators, of commissioners of education, of governors' aides who deal with education, and of teacher union officers and deans of education. The survey offers a comprehensive perspective–from the ground up–of the issues facing the teaching profession and of specific reforms that generate consensus or disagreement.

The Metropolitan Life Survey of Former Teachers in America was also released in 1986. This report is based on a survey of former teachers–the first such survey nationwide. It measures and compares the views of those who left the teaching profession to work in some other occupation.

With *The Metropolitan Life Survey of the American Teacher, 1987: Strengthening Links Between Home and School,* the scope of the series is expanded to include the views of parents of America's schoolchildren. As the study shows, two groups have stood united in their commitment to educating America's youth–parents and teachers.

The 1988 contribution to the series, *The Metropolitan Life Survey of the American Teacher, 1988: Strengthening the Relationship Between Teachers and Students,* surveys the school environment, the student-teacher relationship, and the teaching and learning process, and includes the views of students in grades 4–12. An additional focus of this survey is minority teachers' satisfaction with teaching and ways to increase their participation in the teaching profession.

The Metropolitan Life Survey of the American Teacher, 1989: Preparing Schools for the 1990s, looks back at the changes in education through the decade now ending, and looks ahead to the changes teachers say would improve education and help them do their jobs better. This survey examines school reforms, accountability, the teaching career, the societal problems teachers face in their classroom, and teachers' plans, hopes and level of optimism about the future.

The series also includes several reports on individual states–two surveys of California teachers and one of New York teachers–whose questions parallel the 1984 and 1985 nationwide studies.

For More Information:

Copies of the complete reports of the Metropolitan Life Survey of the American Teacher are available while in print, by writing to:

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The Metropolitan Life Survey of

THE AMERICAN TEACHER 1990

New Teachers: Expectations and Ideals

Part I: Entering the Classroom

First installment of a two-part survey of new teachers who will begin teaching in public schools in 1990–91.

Conducted for
Metropolitan Life Insurance Company
by
Louis Harris and Associates, Inc.

Fieldwork:
July–August 1990

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FOREWORD FROM METROPOLITAN LIFE

The Metropolitan Life Survey of the American Teacher 1989 examined teachers' assessments of nearly a decade of education reform. Highlighting the theme "Preparing Schools for the 1990s," the survey also queried teachers on their expectations about the decade ahead. In order to sharpen the focus on emerging trends for the '90s, we have commisioned Louis Harris and Associates to conduct a two-part survey of those who are, perhaps, closest to the cutting edge in education: new teachers. Spring 1990 graduates of teacher preparation programs, these first-time teachers entered classrooms nationwide in the fall of 1990. The initial installment of the current survey captures their attitudes on several key issues just as they commence their teaching career. In spring 1991, we will return to this cohort of new teachers to guage their attitudes as they conclude their first year in the classroom.

Our goal since we began this series in 1984 has been to provide a forum for the teacher's voice on major education issues. Over the years, respondents have identified key concerns in education improvement. And from the outset, teachers have made it clear that most join the profession—and stick it out—for one reason above all others: *teachers love to teach.* Even though they recognize the host of problems that continues to beset schools, those entering the profession in 1990 are, if anything, redoubling that sense of idealism.

Clearly, this is exciting news, matched by the excitement about teaching that appears to be building throughout America. We invite you to listen to the newest teachers for what they can tell us about the aspirations and concerns they bring to the schools of the 1990s.

INTRODUCTION

This survey was designed to measure the expectations of new graduates from education schools who will start teaching in the public schools this fall.

It includes questions on their expectations in relation to students, administrators, other teachers and parents. It also includes questions on their experiences of teacher training and on their plans for the future.

This is the first of two surveys of new teachers. A second survey will be conducted in spring 1991 to measure the experiences of these teachers, how their exposure to schools and students have affected their attitudes, and how the actual experience of teaching compares with their prior expectations.

The Survey Design

A total of 1,002 new teachers who will start teaching this fall were surveyed. The sample was designed to be representative of all new teachers in the public schools who:

(a) Graduated from teaching colleges this year, and

(b) Have accepted positions as teacher in a public school for 1990-1991

or

Expect to teach in a public school in 1990-91.

The sample was drawn from lists of 1990 graduates from a probability sample of colleges listed by the *American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education*. New graduates who do not expect to be teaching full-time in public schools in 1990-91 were excluded from the sample.

All interviews were conducted by telephone in July and August 1990.

A copy of the questionnaire used is available upon request.

A Note on Reading the Tables

An asterisk (*) on a table signifies a value of less than one-half percent (0.5%). A dash (–) represents a value of zero. Percentages may not always add to 100% because of computer rounding or the acceptance of multiple answers from respondents. The base

for each question is the total answering that question. The base for all tables is 1,002 new teachers.

Possible Sampling Error

It is customary with probability samples of 1,000 to write that "this survey has a possible sampling error of +/- 3%." However, this is a somewhat misleading statement because in any survey there is a small possibility that measurement errors are substantially greater than this, and there is no way to calculate the probabilities of errors arising from factors such as human error, non-response, interviewer bias or respondents who do not understand the questions.

New Teacher Expectations for Themselves and Their Students

New teachers come to their schools full of optimism and idealism. They are virtually unanimous (99% agree) in believing that all children can learn and that they can really make a difference in the lives of their students. A large majority also believes—but much less strongly—that if they do their job well their students will benefit regardless of how well the school functions. (Table 1)

Question: I am going to read you a list of statements about students. Please tell me for each if you agree strongly, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or disagree strongly.

Table **1**

Base 1002

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree Strongly	Not Sure	Total Agree	Total Disagree
	Percentage						
All children can learn	93	6	*	*	*	99	1
I can really make a difference in the lives of my students	83	16	1	*	*	99	1
If I do my job well, my students will benefit regardless of how the rest of the school functions	42	47	10	1	*	89	10
Many children come to school with so many problems that it's very difficult for them to be good students	28	47	18	6	-	75	25
Even the best teachers will find it difficult to really teach more than two-thirds of their students	8	38	39	15	1	45	54

*Less than 0.5%

Observation:

What is most striking here is the enormous idealism with which new teachers are approaching their jobs. Before getting caught up in the realities of the job, they have a very strong faith in what children, and they, themselves, can achieve.

At the same time, however, most believe that many children have difficulty being good students because they "come to school with so many problems," and almost half (45%) tend to agree with the pessimistic statement that "even the best teachers will find it difficult to really teach more than two-thirds of their students." This suggests that, not-withstanding their general optimism, many new teachers may be willing to "write off" some of their students.

Expectations for Principals and for the Status and Dedication of Teachers

Table 2 provides more evidence of the generally optimistic outlook of new teachers. They all (98%) expect that their principals will create a positive environment for learning, and fully 73% believe this strongly. They almost all (90%) agree that most teachers are dedicated to their work, although only 30% believe this strongly. There is less certainty that teachers are respected in today's society. While 60% believe that teachers are respected, only 7% believe it strongly and 40% do not believe it at all.

Question: I am going to read you a list of statements about school administrators and teachers. Please tell me for each if you agree strongly, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or disagree strongly.

Table 2

Base 1002	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree Strongly	Not Sure	Total Agree	Total Disagree
	Percentage						
I expect that the principal of my school will create an environment which will help my students learn	73	24	2	-	*	98	2
Most teachers are dedicated to their work	30	60	9	1	*	90	10
Teachers are respected in today's society	7	53	31	9	*	60	40

*Less than 0.5%

Expectations for Parents and the Need for School-based Social Services

There is unanimous agreement (99%), almost all "very strong," on the need for teachers to work well with their students' parents. Many new teachers see this is a difficult problem, however, to judge from the 70% who believe that too many parents treat schools and teachers as adversaries. Apparently, many new teachers believe a good working relationship with parents is much needed, but is not now in place (Table 3).

Question: I am going to read you a list of statements about parents and the community. Please tell me for each if you agree strongly, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or disagree strongly.

Table 3

Base 1002	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree Strongly	Not Sure	Total Agree	Total Disagree
	Percentage						
Effective teachers need to be able to work well with their students' parents	91	9	1	*	-	99	1
Too many parents today treat their children's schools and teachers as adversaries	14	56	25	3	1	70	28
A school's job is to teach children. Health and social problems should be addressed by other agencies outside the school	3	17	42	38	*	19	80

*Less than 0.5%

Observation:
These new teachers feel the educational process can no longer be limited to the interaction between student and teacher in the classroom.

One current debate is whether, and to what extent, schools should go beyond teaching and attempt to deal with the health and social problems of students. By 4-to-1 new teachers believe schools should do this and reject the argument that the only function of the school should be to teach.

Teacher Preparation

Most new teachers (80%) believe that they were prepared by their training to teach students from a variety of different ethnic backgrounds. However, the 20% who do not feel they were prepared to do this may still be larger than it should be. Most new teachers (66%) endorse the idea of a nationwide, standardized test for all teachers. Of these, 31% endorse the idea strongly. (Table 4-1).

Question: I am going to read you a list of statements about your training. Please tell me for each if you agree strongly, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or disagree strongly.

Table **4-1**

Base 1002	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree Strongly	Not Sure	Total Agree	Total Disagree
	Percentage						
My training has prepared me to teach students from a variety of ethnic backgrounds	42	39	15	5	-	80	20
All teachers should take a national, standardized test to demonstrate their qualifications	31	35	19	15	*	66	34
I wish I had more practical training to be a teacher before I begin to have my own classroom	26	32	23	18	*	58	42

*Less than 0.5%

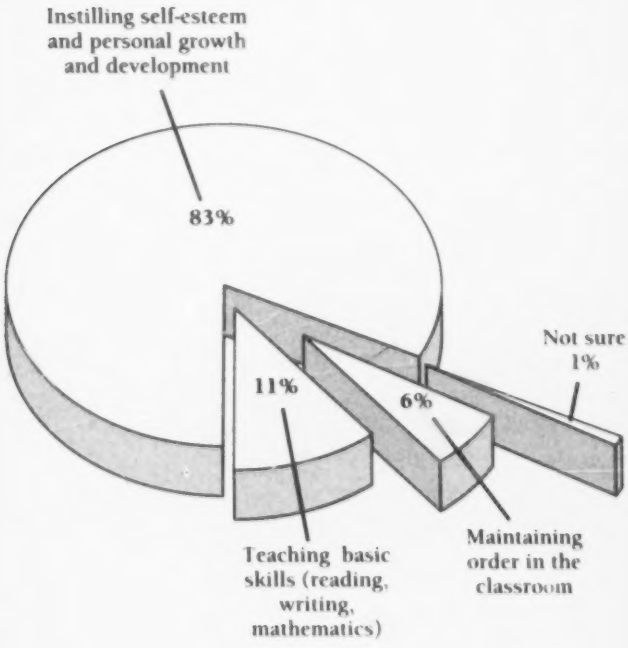
In what is either a criticism of their preparation or merely an admission of nervousness (it is not clear which) most new teachers (by 58% to 42%) would have liked to have had more practical training before beginning to work on their own in the classroom. For better or for worse, their next few months will be a time for on-the-job-training.

There is a widespread consensus among new teachers that instilling self-esteem, personal growth, and development in their students is more important than either teaching basic skills or maintaining order and discipline (Table 4-2).

Question: If you had to choose, which one aspect of teaching do you think is most important to helping students learn?

Table **4-2**

Base 1002



Observation:

What is not entirely clear from these replies is whether most new teachers believe that self-esteem, personal growth and development are more important than learning "the three Rs", *or* whether they believe that the former promotes more successful learning of the latter—whether personal growth is valued more as an end in itself or as a means to learning and education.

Plans For A Teaching Career– Past, Present And Future

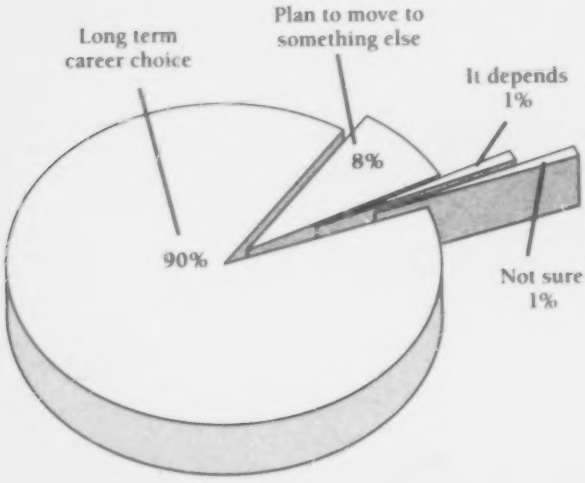
Future Plans

The overwhelming majority of new teachers (90%) view teaching as a long term career. It will be interesting to see–when Harris surveys these new teachers again next year–whether this expectation changes as a result of hands-on experience in the classroom (Table 5-1).

Question: At this time, do you view teaching as a long term career, or something you expect to do for a few years and then move on to something else?

Table **5-1**

Base 1002



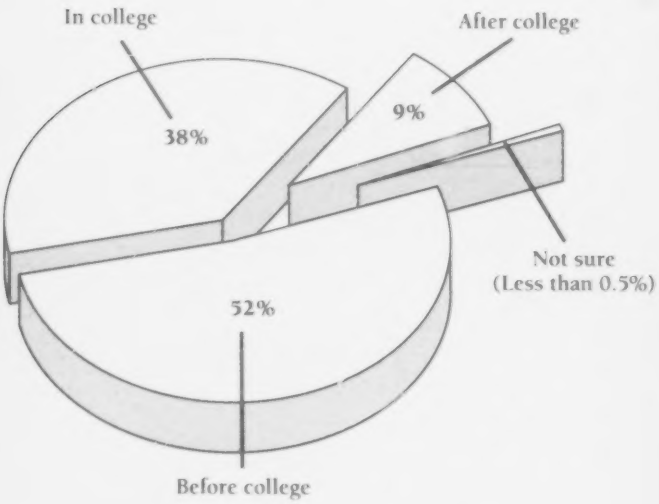
When Students Decide to Become Teachers

Only 38% of new teachers in public schools chose a teaching career when they were college students. A small number (9%) chose to teach after college. Just over half decided to become teachers before college, presumably in high school or even earlier (Table 5-2).

Question: Did you decide to become a teacher before entering college, while you were in college, or after you graduated from college?

Table 5-2

Base 1002



Observation:

Those concerned to attract quality students into the teaching profession can interpret these data in several ways. On the one hand, they could focus their efforts on influencing more high school students. On the other, they could improve their efforts to recruit more college students and graduates. However, if so many young people choose a teaching career while still in high school, influencing them before college may be a particularly effective way to address the growing teacher shortage.

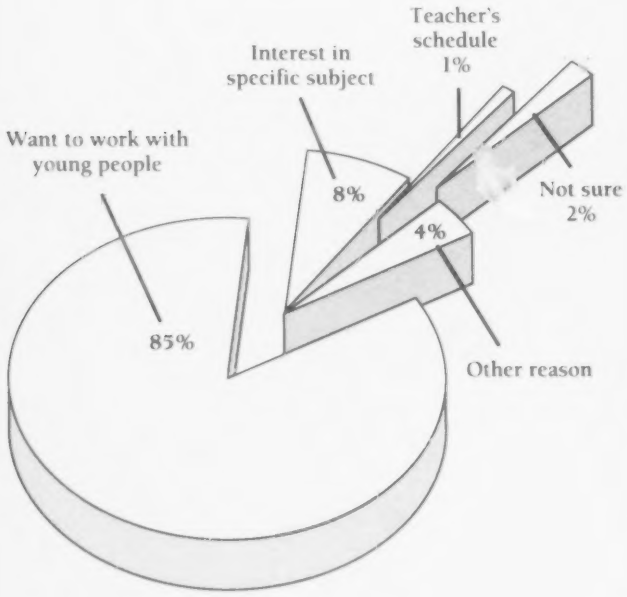
Why Students Choose To Teach

Only in a relatively few instances is the decision to teach based primarily on an interest in the subjects taught. The overwhelming majority of new teachers are primarily attracted to the profession by their wish to work with young people (Table 5-3).

Question: Which is the most important reason you chose to become a teacher? Is it because you want to work with and help young people, because of your interest in a specific subject (such as history), because a teacher's schedule fits best with your other obligations, or for some other reason?

Table 5-3

Base 1002

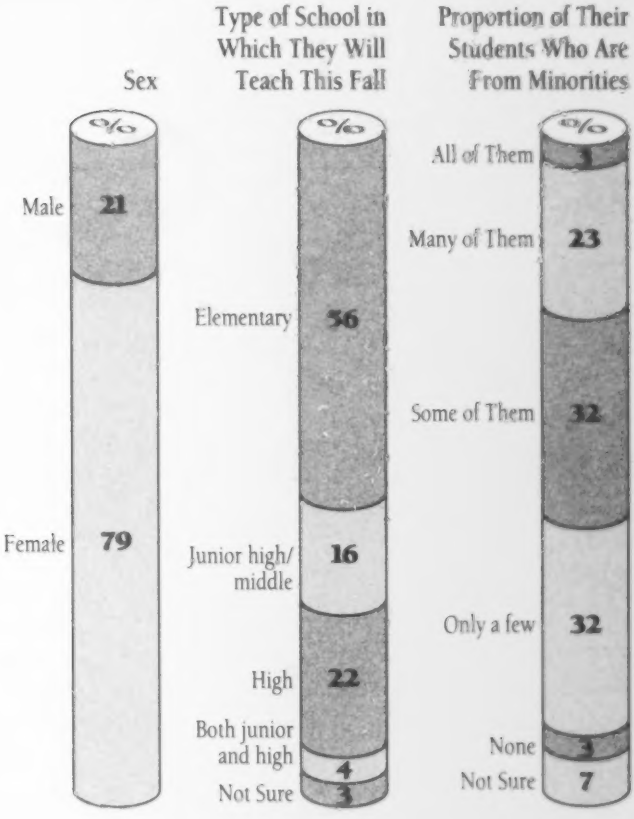


Some Hard Data on New Teachers

The following is a profile of new teachers, 1990 graduates of teaching schools, who are starting to teach in the public schools this fall.

Table 6

Base 1002



In addition, it should be noted that 99% of the new teachers surveyed said that they would be willing to be surveyed again later in the academic year.

CONCLUSION

The overall picture of new teachers revealed by this survey is one of a cohort of positively motivated, optimistic and somewhat idealistic young people, whose idealism does not blind them to the societal problems which will make their jobs more difficult. They come to their new schools with high expectations for their principals, their fellow teachers, and themselves, but with a recognition of the difficulties they may have with some students and an awareness that they will need, but will not always get, the support of parents.

TEACHERS SPEAK OUT...

Who's joining the teaching profession in the 1990s–and why?

Are first year teachers willing to work more closely with parents?...To meet national certification standards?... To stay in the classroom for the long haul?

Do new teachers believe it's the school's job to address social and health issues?

Can ***all*** *children learn? Can one teacher make a difference?*

These are some of the issues addressed by a national poll of first-time teachers in the latest *Metropolitan Life Survey of the American Teacher.*

Louis Harris and Associates queried 1,000 new teachers to shed light on where teachers are coming from...and, in turn, where schools are going.

We'll go back to these same teachers at the end of their first year in the classroom. We'll take a look at how the *realities* of teaching compare to new teachers' *expectations.*

In the meantime, we hope you will find this poll informative. As with seven previous national surveys, we at **MetLife** believe it is critically important to provide a forum for the teacher's voice. We recognize that skilled teachers are essential to the success of our schools...*and our children.*

Metropolitan Life
AND AFFILIATED COMPANIES

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